

Court orders Legislature to redistrict by February 25

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The Legislature today was given until February 25, 1972, to draw new legislative and congressional — district boundaries.

A Federal Court order was filed this afternoon, setting that deadline. Otherwise, the court said, a court-appointed “master” will be given authority to draw new boundaries.

The Legislature, split by a Republican-controlled House and a Democratic-controlled Senate, failed to reach agreement on redistricting during its 1971 session.

REPRESENTATIVES of both parties have been negotiating in recent weeks, seeking some compromises. But they report little headway.

The court order thus will force redistricting as a top-priority issue when Gov. Dan

Evans calls the Legislature into its expected special session next January.

The redistricting argument has been bitter. Each party fears the new boundaries could give the other party an edge in future elections.

The order by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals was not what Democratic leaders had hoped for.

Senator R.R. (Bob) Greive, Seattle Democrat and majority leader in the Senate, said recently he hoped the court would not set a deadline. He indicated then he preferred that the court only direct the Legislature to give a priority to redistricting.

Greive fears that Republicans in the Legislature will hold out against any bill, to force the issue to a court decision.

Today’s court order said any party could nominate a

person to be the master and could suggest redistricting guidelines to the court.

Once designated, the master would have to file a plan both for legislative and congressional redistricting within 30 days.

Because the 1970 federal census produced new population statistics, the state is required constitutionally to draw new boundaries in accord with the one-man, one-vote principle.

The state’s two congressional districts in Eastern Washington will be increased in size. More legislative districts will be concentrated in Western Washington.

The court order, filed here by United States District Judge William T. Beeks, is the result of a suit filed by George Prince, Mercer Island attorney.